

Shakespeare: The Histories and Comedies
Rhode Island College

English 345
Gary R. Grund
MTh 12:30-1:20

“It is natural that people under new cultural imperatives should be impelled to fasten new interpretations (from the reasonable to the fantastic) onto aesthetic objects from the past. But criticism cannot stop there. The critic may well begin, „Look at it this way for a change,’ but the sentence must continue. „and now don’t you see it as more intelligibly beautiful and moving?’ That is, if the interpretation does not reveal some hitherto occluded aspect of the aesthetic power of the art work, it is useless as art criticism (though it may be useful as cultural history or sociology or psychology or religion).”--Helen Vendler

Our goal in this course is the retrieval of the power, beauty, and joy to be found in the greatest poet in the language by carefully reading five of his histories and about the same number of comedies. The relentless struggles for power and the vagaries of love are the poles between which our analyses will oscillate, our classroom discussions punctuated by references to Shakespeare’s dramatic background and the conventions of the Renaissance stage.

I have ordered *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller, 2nd edition, Penguin, 2002 (ISBN 0141000589) as the single text in the course. Other standard texts—either complete collections or editions of individual plays—are perfectly acceptable. As a further way of reducing costs, students may wish to download various software, such as MS .lit, Palm, or Adobe, to read e-books of Shakespeare’s plays on laptops or PDAs for use in class.

In addition to the reading assignments itemized below, there will be two papers required for the course: a short (3-4 pages) treatment of Shakespeare’s language due February 25 and a somewhat longer (5-6 pages) essay due at the end of the term. There will also be a mid-term examination on the history plays on March 8-11 and a final examination on the comedies at the end of term.

CALENDAR:

Week 1 *Introduction: The Intellectual and Dramatic Background*

Recommended: Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia Parker, eds., *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (1987); R. Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre* (1988); Allen Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (1984); Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn, eds., *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays* (1981); Carolyn R. S. Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol T. Neely, eds., *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1980); and Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004).

Week 2 *Richard III*

Recommended: Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Parts 1 and 2* (1587); *A Myrroure for Magistrates* (1559); and Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre Theory in the Renaissance* (1973).

Week 3 *Richard II*

Recommended: Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II* (1593); Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957); and Patricia Parker and David Quint, eds., *Literary Theory and Renaissance Texts* (1986).

Week 4 *1 Henry IV*

Recommended: Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama* (1977) and John Norwich, *Shakespeare's Kings: The Great Plays and the History of England in the Middle Ages, 1337-1485* (2001).

Week 5 *2 Henry IV* PAPER DUE, WEEKRUARY 25

Recommended: René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (1977) and Reuben Brower, *Hero & Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman heroic Tradition* (1971)

Week 6 *Henry V*

Recommended: Edward Said, ed., *Literature and Society* (1980)
And Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1957).

- Week 7 MID-TERM EXAMINATION
- Week 8 *Introduction: Comedy*
- Week 9 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- Recommended: Rensselear Lee, *Names on Trees* (1977) and Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All* (2004).
- Week 10 *The Merchant of Venice*
- Recommended: Marc Shell, *Money, Language and Thought* (1980) and Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1999).
- Week 11 *As You Like It*
- Recommended: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) and Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (1972).
- Week 12 *Twelfth Night*
- Recommended: William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1950); J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (1944); and C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959)
- Week 13 *The Tempest*
- Recommended: Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (1965) and Anthony Burgess, *Shakespeare: A Life* (1970).
- Week 14 Reading Period. *The Winter's Tale*. PAPER DUE, APRIL 29.